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# THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES.

## II.—THE COLLECTION OF MR. HENRY C. GIBSON, PHILADELPHIA.

### FIRST ARTICLE.



CHARITY. — BY KAULBACH.

PEN-AND-INK SKETCH BY JAMES D. SMILLIE. — FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

PRIVATE collections of works of art are brought together for the delight of the owner and his privileged friends, and not to illustrate any particular school or department of art for the purposes of study. In writing upon such a collection, therefore, each example must be considered as an individual work by an individual artist, and not as one of a class. Yet Mr. Gibson's collection presents at least a limited view of the development and tendency of modern art. It includes the works of Meyer von Bremen and Kaulbach on the one hand, and of Chelmonski and Munkácsy on the other, thus illustrating most forcibly the changes which have taken place within the last thirty years. The several Continental schools are here each represented; and while the French artists necessarily predominate, — France being the present art centre of Europe, — Germany, Spain, and Italy are not neglected. Mr. Gibson's collection numbers one hundred pictures, and a survey of them, arranged as they are with rare good taste, in several small, well-lighted cabinets, must leave upon the mind the conviction that

very few collections in this country are of as high a standard and of such uniform excellence.

The initial illustration to this article gives a pen-and-ink sketch of Kaulbach's *Charity*. Of late years it has become so fashionable to sneer at Kaulbach, for extravagant composition, heroic drawing, and unsympathetic coloring, that one expects to have the shafts of ridicule hurled at him, if he ventures even to whisper his praise. Art to be pure and true and elevating must be a psychological effort, — the expression of a conception, — and certainly Kaulbach fulfilled this requirement in its largest sense. To us this picture of *Charity* is very attractive. The color is not good, being too monotonous and raw, and in the flesh tints brick-dusty; but as a classical composition it is unexceptionable; the modelling is firm, the drawing correct, and the feeling delicate and refined. Kaulbach's paintings are rarely met with in this country, and Mr. Gibson's

acquisition of this picture is curious. It is the original from which the *Mutterliebe*, now owned by Mr. Probasco, of Cincinnati, was painted. Mr. Gibson saw it in the artist's studio, and desired much to purchase it. But Kaulbach would not part with it; it was a favorite with him, and he wished to keep it. Subsequently the picture was brought to New York and sold in the Derby sale, where Mr. Gibson, more fortunate than he had been with the artist, procured it.

Hanging not far from this last-mentioned work is a small canvas by Meyer von Bremen, entitled *The Little Rogue*. It represents a young girl sitting in a large arm-chair beside a table, holding in her hands a huge folio volume, over which she is gazing at some distant object, with a smile on her face and a roguish twinkle in her round, dark eyes. J. Georg Meyer, who is a follower of the old Düsseldorf school, has been much admired in this country, and a number of his best works are to be found here. But we have outgrown the smooth and labored manner of his style; and his pictures, while the subjects are oftentimes pleasing, fail to impress us, owing to the lack of spirit and strength in the treatment.

In strong contrast with Meyer von Bremen's manner, are two works by the Hungarian artist, Mihaly Munkácsy. This painter has been so often mentioned of late in connection with the celebrated picture of *Milton dictating to his Daughters*, — a canvas which we consider far inferior in artistic merit to either of the two on Mr. Gibson's walls, — that it seems superfluous to speak of him here, otherwise, than as an artist *par excellence*. As a colorist Munkácsy is weak, but his treatment is broad and his results are brilliant. His manner is forcibly illustrated in *The Wrestler's Challenge*, a large picture four feet and a quarter long by three feet high. The scene is laid in a low ceiling vault, with casks and bottles and cups around. The vault is lighted by one small, arched window on the side, and a hanging lamp suspended from the rafters. The challenger — an itinerant Hercules — stands in the centre of the picture, where he has struck his most defiant attitude. The challenged stands a little to the right, and is a nobly modelled figure, full of that quiet force which, while he is taking in his opponent, shows that the victory will be to the strong, as the race is to the swift. Nothing could exceed the expression upon the faces of the men, women, and children who are grouped around waiting and watching for the fray. Each one of them is a study of human character. Aside from the two central figures there are two others, so fine that they can hardly be called secondary. One is an old man sitting beside the table, evidently the inn-keeper, and the other a little two-year-old, who is helping herself to dumplings, while the elders are eager for the trial. Mr. Gibson's second picture by Munkácsy is a *Hungarian Encampment* on the edge of a forest, the figures by the wagons evidently those of gypsies. This picture is not equal to the first in execution, but it grows upon the beholder, and one returns to it each time with renewed satisfaction.

Jozef Chelmonski is known to us only by his *Souvenir d'un Voyage en Ukraine*, dated March, 1877, and measuring six feet by three feet and a half. A rough sled, made out of hewn logs, is being pulled through deep snow by four superb gray horses. The scene is cold and cheerless, but all the truer for it. The only relief to the pervading grays is the yellow straw on the floor of the sled, the scarlet woollen scarf around the neck of the solitary passenger, and the vermillion crown of the driver's hat. The horses, which are magnificently modelled, plunge and tear to keep warm, and their full action will carry them, soon, out of sight. Belonging to the same class of subjects is Schreyer's *Arab's Retreat*, a fine specimen of this celebrated artist's work, full of his mannerisms, which are marked, but not objectionable. Fromentin's *Halt in the Desert* is in curious contrast with the Schreyer, showing how dissimilarly two artists will treat a subject of a similar character. Fromentin's Arab chargers are sleek, well-bred coursers, while Schreyer's steeds are of the powerful, heavier Wallachian race. In Fromentin's painting there is a noble dignity seldom seen in pictures, and this quality is very manifest in the one which Mr. Gibson possesses.

There is one picture which forms the *chef-d'œuvre* of the collection, and stands entirely alone, no matter from what stand-point we view it. We refer to *Le Triomphe d'une Femme Équivoque*,



LE TRIOMPHE D'UNE FEMME EQUIVOQUE.

BY THOMAS COUTURE.

Pen-and-Ink Sketch by James D. Smilhe. From a Photograph.

by Thomas Couture. We have spoken of this picture and its author on a previous occasion,—soon after the artist's death,—and what we say now can be little else than a summarized repetition of what we said then. We look upon Couture as the great master of his time, and we claim that his influence will be felt and recognized, when others—names perchance at present more famous—are forgotten. Couture was an idealist in the highest, truest, best sense of the word, for he was also a moralist. What he lacked most was a delicate, sensitive refinement. All of his pictures teach some lesson, even though they represent but a single head, such as the *Roman Youth*, a superb and thoughtful study, also in Mr. Gibson's possession.

*Le Triomphe d'une Femme Équivoque* is a grand allegorical composition, painted in 1873, and measuring six feet by four. The design is shown in the sketch here reproduced. The story is a serious one, pointing backward and forward, and calling, "Halt!" It tells how, if the pleasures of the moment alone are pursued, the thorns and thistles that strew the path will assuredly assert themselves when, possibly, it may be too late, even though they seem to bend so easily to the will. The life of the principal actress in the scene is made to reflect itself in lonely, decrepit age, as surely as the lives of her satellites will reach the goal of debauched Silenus. Referring to this great composition, an accomplished and highly esteemed scholar recently wrote to its owner: "Cart-ropes cannot drag me from the conviction that the final destination of the original, long after you and I and the rest of us are dust and ashes, should be a church. If pictures can preach, what more eloquent sermon can be uttered than by this painting, in favor of purity and of abhorrence for the path that leads down to utter misery and death?" As a technical piece of work, also, this picture must ever hold a high place. It exhibits in the highest degree Couture's principles and manner, his theory and his practice, his strong and expressive drawing, his rich, brilliant, and suggestive coloring.

The poetic Hamon has here a delicious idyl, called *Night*, in which the aerial effect of the floating figures is exceedingly well rendered. The drawing is poor, and the color ineffective, but the taste displayed is exquisite. Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* is so well known through the engraving by Alphonse François, that a minute description would hardly be permissible. The form of the goddess is round and voluptuous, and the poetry of gentle motion, as the body responds to the undulations of the sea, is marvellously expressed, while the semi-consciousness with which she half raises her arm from off her opening lids is most seductive. The picture is light in tone and delicate in color, which two qualities render pure a composition that otherwise might seem objectionable.

The marine painters who contribute to the collection are Achenbach, Clays, and Hamilton, and their pictures are each good in their individuality. Achenbach has an effective *Coast Scene*, Clays an admirably painted *Dead Calm* off the coast of Holland, and Hamilton, the only American artist represented by a meritorious work, an eminently characteristic *Sea-Shore*.

Possibly there is no artist of our day whose works have warmer admirers and more outspoken opponents than Jean Baptiste Camille Corot. If it is true, and we think it is, that the landscapist shows his art more by conveying an impression faithfully than by reproducing a scene with accuracy, then Corot should be awarded the meed, for his pictures seem to portray only fleeting thoughts and vague impressions. His great fault is his indistinctness; his pictures lack form, and produce their effects by misty indecision. He has, however, a delicate grace of sentiment, and a tender, almost timid method of rendering his subject, that show him to be a poetical dreamer, in which respect he resembles Turner. Mr. Gibson has two of his landscapes, and one of them, *At Break of Day*, a suggestion of which is given herewith, we admire more than any other of the many pictures by Corot which we have seen. It is a very feeling bit of nature, when the cool gray of the morning is so delicious. Daubigny is another idealist of the Corot stamp, full of taste and pathos, whose pictures are toned to such a harmonious key that they almost become monotonous. The landscape by him in Mr. Gibson's collection is a good specimen of his manner.



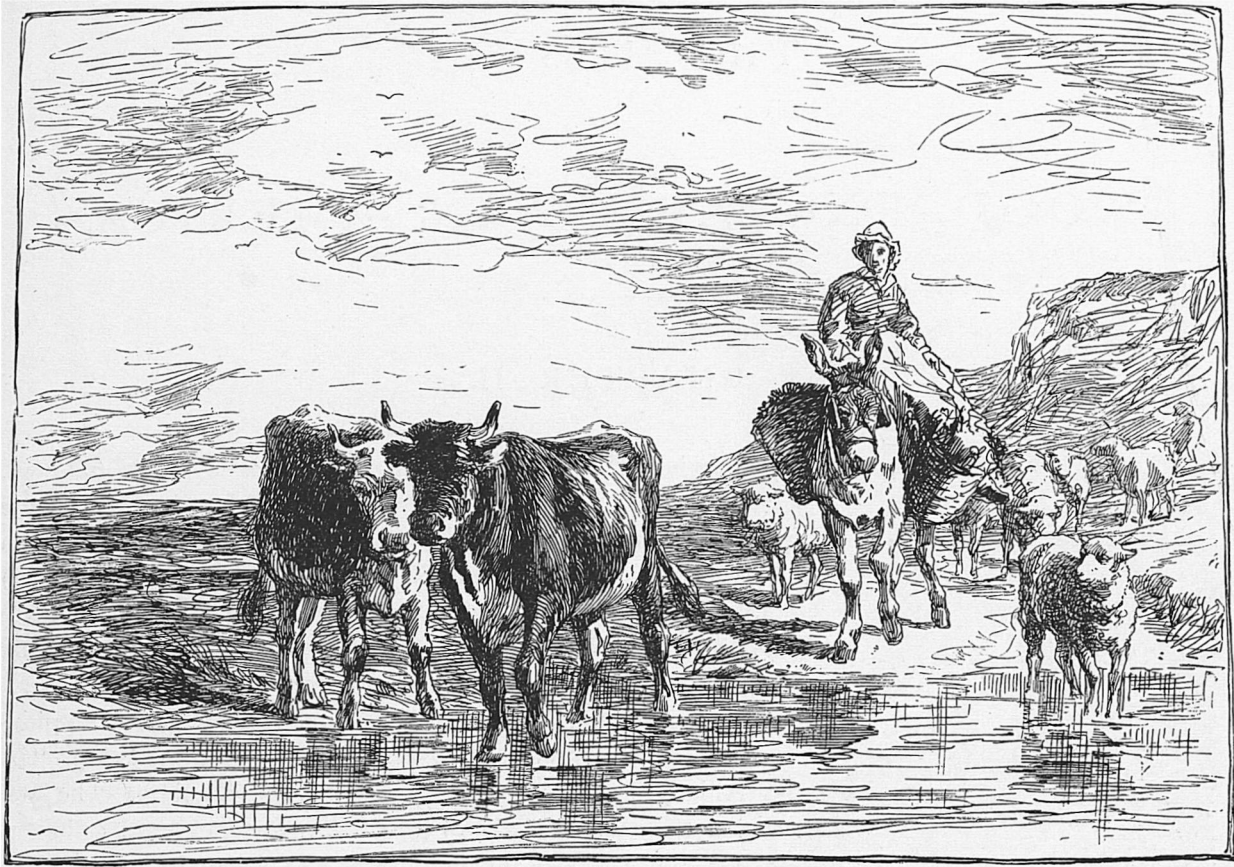


AT BREAK OF DAY.—BY COROT.

PEN-AND-INK SKETCH BY JAMES D. SMILLIE.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

Another artist who, like Corot, stands midway between passionate admiration and violent condemnation, is Jean François Millet. It is claimed that he is an artist who aims in his pictures at an exact imitation of Nature. We should consider him rather the reverse; that he is a rustic poet, who uses Nature with a license, never forgetting her, but imbuing her with feeling when she would be cold and irresponsible. *The Shepherd* is a picture of emotion, of sentiment; the untold tells so much, that one returns to this painting, discovering some new expression each time. And yet it is nothing but a shepherd overtaken by night, followed by his flock and his faithful dog. The atmospheric effect here is untranslatable into words. It is chilly; the sheep are huddled together, and the shepherd has his long cloak closely gathered around him. Your sympathy is won for the toiler whose labor is so unremitting, whose life is so lonely; and the painter's philosophy expresses itself in the grave tones of his color. *The Shepherd* is a painted poem, and to appreciate it one must *feel*. There is a small etching of this picture, by Courty, but it does no sort of justice to the original.

Nature, it seems to us, is looked upon by Jules Breton much in the same manner as Millet regards it, despite the great apparent difference in the methods of the two artists. Breton, as a painter, is the most perfectly rounded and symmetrical now living. He does all things well; nothing could be added, no improvement made, to any picture that comes from his easel, while the simplicity of his work renders description difficult. *The Potato Harvest*, probably known to many of our readers from the etching by Bracquemond, is simply an episode in the daily life of a peasant,—a woman emptying a basket of potatoes into a bushel-bag held for the purpose by one of her co-laborers. And yet these two real ideal women, these potato gatherers, elevate the whole sex. They are not painted above their station, but in their station;



LANDSCAPE AND CATTLE. — BY TROYON.

PEN-AND-INK SKETCH BY JAMES D. SMILLIE. — FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

not with delicacy and gentle grace, but teeming with strength and vigor and robust health. The painter thus gives them their own idea of perfect beauty, and by this idealization of nature he excites admiration and reaps the rich reward of his unrivalled art. It has been well said of Jules Breton, that "his pictures are rich in truth, yet not without the elevating ideal element; and its ideality is of that genuine kind which is in perfect harmony with reality." If Breton excels in any one particular, it is in his wonderful painting of hands and feet,—the most difficult part of the human figure to render satisfactorily. His technical qualities are very high, his manner broad, and his coloring unsurpassed.

Constant Troyon was a capable artist, but he seems to us to have been somewhat overrated. His work bears too much the appearance of labor, of hard work; an effect which may arise from the fact that he never worked on one picture continuously, if we may trust tradition, until it was finished, but kept a number about him in various stages of progress. His *Landscape and Cattle*, as seen in the sketch, is a quiet, dignified, and truthful picture in all its parts. It would seem, however, that *Crossing the Ford* would be a more correct title, as that is what the cattle are about to do, while the landscape is quite subordinate.

The two Bonheurs, Rosa and her brother Auguste,—the latter the more accomplished artist of the two,—are represented by very good pictures. To the same class belongs *The Last Hour*, by August Schenck, a grand, life-like picture of sheep ready for the shearer. Voltz has a large oblong *Approach of a Storm*, with a herd of cattle contemplating the prospect. Van Marcke's *Landscape and Cattle* has been reproduced in etching by Mr. Peter Moran, of Philadelphia. In this etching the cattle are very well given, but the landscape, a most difficult one to translate by the needle, has not been quite so happily rendered.

CHARLES HENRY HART.